

than ma

Take one part lady-vampire, one part Mae West-style comedienne, one part TV hostess, and squeeze them into a slinky black dress that's got more pressure on it than the British economy and you have cult horror queen Elvira. She's got scarlet lips, bee-hived black hair, chalk-white skin, and a cleavage that just won't quit. Let's face it, this is *not* the sort of gal you would want to take home to meet your mum!

According to Elvira's alter-ego and creator, former showgirl Cassandra Peterson, she's descended from a line of powerful sorceresses and her mother was the first to break that line by marrying a mere mortal. So she's half-mortal and half-witch, which often leads to her getting a bit confused; wouldn't you be if you woke up every morning with a bouffant hair-do and heavy gothic make-up?

The busty star of *Elvira - Mistress Of The Dark* (New World Video) is still a bit of an unknown quantity in the UK. But over in the States she has gathered quite

a following in eight years of haunting the airwaves introducing her own late night horror show called *Movie Macabre*.

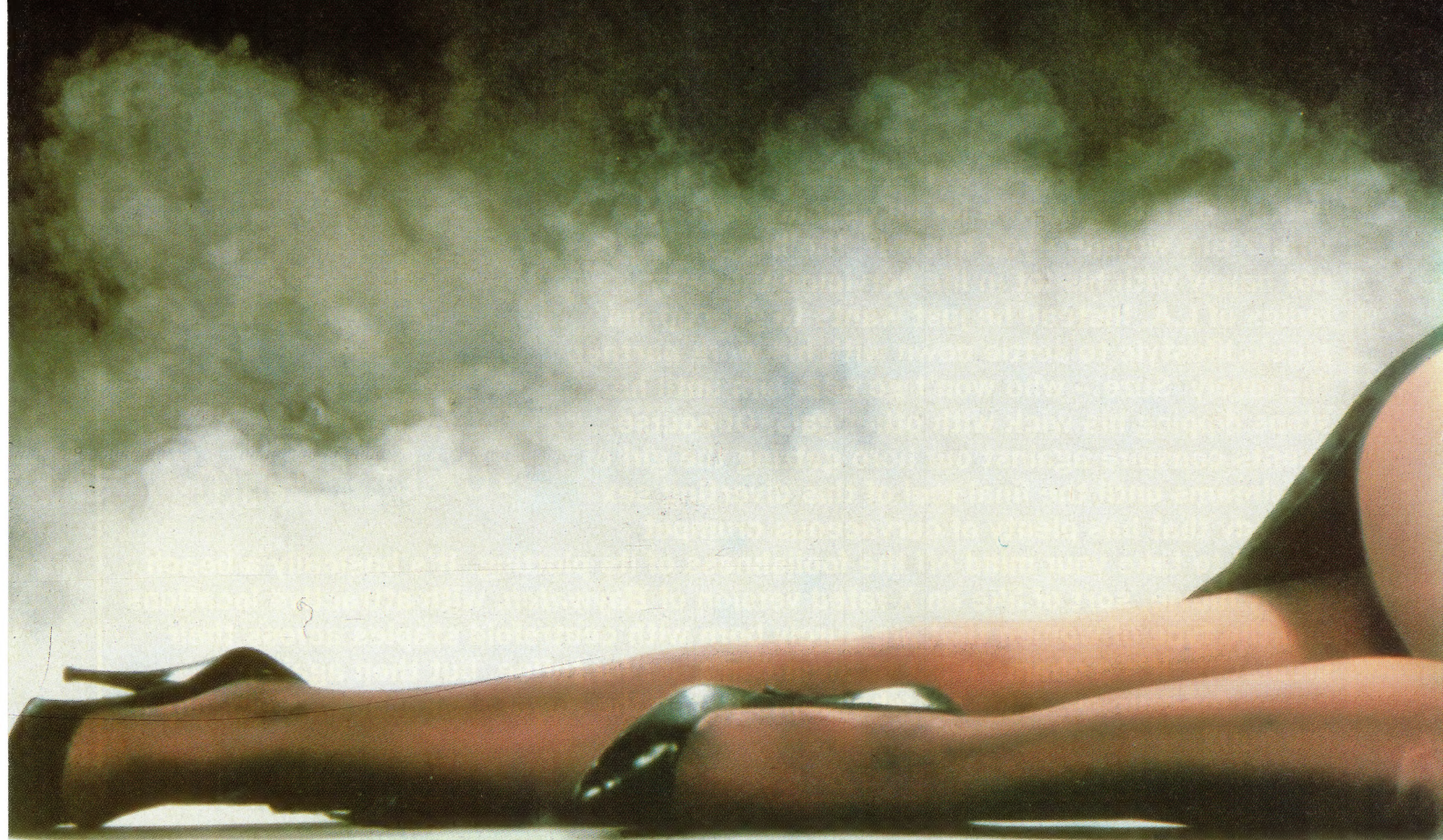
"We basically buy up all these dreadful old horror flicks for syndication," she says. "Then I come on and gag it up a little while I introduce them. You know the sort of thing: 'If this was an in-flight movie, people would still walk out on it.'" She cites one of her favourites, a Spanish/Italian gore epic called *Tombs Of The Blind Dead*. "That went down particularly well with my discriminating audience. After we cut out all the lesbian scenes there was no plot left for the audience to worry about."

This horror hostess lark might seem a bit odd to British audiences who are still trying to get used to the sight of a shell-shocked Alex Cox wandering in to introduce late night cult movies on BBC 2. But in the States there have been a long line of maniacal horror hosts with

names like *Vampira*, *Ghoulardi* and *Ghoulita*.

But none of them really came to much, which is why Cassandra says she had to think very carefully before she accepted the role. "It really seemed like scraping the bottom of the barrel at first. But I was only getting dopey parts on shows like *Fantasy Island* and *Happy Days*, and I didn't have any money. So I eventually swallowed my pride and took the job."

As it happened it was a wise move. "Instead of it just being a one day a week sort of employment where I'd make a few bucks, it turned into a phenomenon in



ks for the mmaries

**Dirty Dave Ross meets Elvira, the
horror hostess with the mostest,
and discovers that the
lady is a vamp...**





get the script in shape," she says. "But the writing was the most enjoyable part of the process. We drank about a thousand of these things called Jolt Colas - which we called comedy juice - while we were doing it."

The film was a big hit on video in the States and proved equally popular over here. On the basis of this she says she would love to follow it up with her own television series. "I'm sure you have plenty of bad movies over here that I can introduce..."

But in the meantime she's not exactly scratching around for work. "I haven't had a week off in eight years," she complains. "Right now I've just finished doing a big promotion for Pepsi. Then there's an Elvira pinball machine coming out, and I'm doing a phone-line thing in the States where you call in to hear a spooky message. I'm also writing articles for magazines."

The talented actress/comedienne concludes by explaining her philosophy that life is all about mastering two sides of a coin: "I'm very lucky," she says. "Because I like the advantage of being two people - having a private life and a celebrity life. Okay, so the bad part of the job is having to wear all this make-up all the time. It takes two hours to put on and can get very uncomfortable. But all I ever wanted to do was act and get paid for it. As long as I keep doing that, then I don't even care if I have to dress up like a banana!"

Hollywood, eventually spreading all over the States after we syndicated the show nationally."

The real turning point for the actress came when she began to secure merchandising deals for Elvira posters, Elvira Halloween costumes and comic books - and even a commemorative china plate! That in turn led to TV commercials and guest spots in movies like *Jekyll and Hyde - Together Again*, and eventually her own picture, *Elvira - Mistress Of The Dark*.

The lady herself describes this zany comedy as, "a macabre version of *Harper Valley PTA*." The story sees Elvira fired from her position as a TV hostess because she won't put out for the new owner of the station. "I need this job like a leper needs a three-way mirror" she snarls, before bringing tears to his eyes with a swift kick in the family jewels.

Then she heads off to the small town of Falwell, Massachusetts, to claim an inheritance left by a mysterious aunt who has just kicked the bucket. But first she

must face the wrath of the local puritans, who want to burn her at the stake, and deal with a vengeful warlock uncle, who has been cut out of the will and wants to get hold of a sinister recipe book containing the secret words that will unlock the dark powers that are part of Elvira's legacy.

The film is funny, sexy, and according to Cassandra, "A lot more risqué than I could get away with on television. It also has more boob jokes than any film in recent memory (mammary?), and its heroine's aggressively cantilevered stance recalls the best of Russ Meyer. Call them sexist if you wish, but most of the gags were scripted by Elvira herself in collaboration with two other accomplished comedy writers.

"It took us about a year to



